

Coordinating Programs Across the Reservation

An Update on the Navajo Extension Partnership



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Navajo Extension Partnership team members meet on a regular basis with Gerald Moore (far right), coordinating extension agent, to address community issues.

By Joanne Littlefield

The roads wind through rugged mountain terrain, canyons, cliffs and sprawling grasslands. The Navajo Nation is home to 260,000 people spread out over 26,000 square miles. Population centers vary from the urban areas of Gallup and Farmington in New Mexico or Tuba City and Window Rock in Arizona to smaller communities 20 miles away from each other. Many families live 10 miles from the nearest town.

The Navajo Extension Partnership (NEP) was formalized in 1998 as a way to coordinate the activities of the many tribal, federal, county, state and university programs handling issues of residents on the Navajo Nation (*see sidebar*). Because there can be hundreds of miles to traverse from the western to eastern edge of the reservation, and travel budgets are dwindling, coordinating schedules through email and telephone contact helps agents address emerging community issues.

Matching needs with available educational resources has been the role Gerald Moore, coordinating extension agent with the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, has played since he was hired in 1992.

"Some duplication of extension programs from neighboring states and also neighboring counties showed us there was a need to have program consistency and to find a way to reduce program duplication," Moore says.

Just as the terrain changes in elevation and vegetation type as you go from east to west and from north to south on the Navajo Nation, so does the composition of farming and ranching operations. There are 46,000 acres of farmland on the reservation, which is geographically situated in three states — Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. That means researchers from New Mexico State University, Utah State

University and The University of Arizona could be involved in programs on the reservation. In addition, there are 1,433,906 acres supporting tribal ranches, and 345,800 head of livestock. Thus animal science and rangeland research and education for the approximately 12,000 livestock grazing permittees and others who use the land may also come from a variety of sources. These include the surrounding counties and departments within the Navajo Nation government.

The eastern part of the Navajo Nation comprises a checkerboard pattern of land use — plots of Indian land are interspersed with private and state land. With talks of diverting water from the San Juan River for Navajo agricultural use, the number of plots dedicated to farming and ranching may increase. New farms are being planned near Ganado and north of Tsaile. Moore is working with local growers and Navajo Nation farm board members to consider how to develop markets for an increased number of commodities.

"I try to tie into existing meetings to promote information available from the university," he says. "If there are meetings already set up and the topic is relevant to agriculture, natural resources and 4-H youth development, I try to be involved in some way. Besides providing educational programs, we are working to identify needed research in areas such as range management and family life."

Before the establishment of the NEP, each chapter house had to request its own set of educational meetings with experts from various governmental agencies and educational institutions, according to Moore.

The chapter house is essentially a local town hall where reservation members have access to computers and the Internet, along with the opportunity to attend community

meetings on issues of local concern. Community issues vary across the reservation, from health problems to access to water. In the western portion of the Navajo Nation, for instance, diabetes and substance abuse among Navajos who were moved from rural areas are a concern for Hardrock Chapter residents. Access to water for farming activities tops the list in another region.

Sometimes traditional Cooperative Extension programs overlap with existing programs on the reservation. An example of such cross-programming efforts is found in the way UA Master Gardener training is handled. Although the traditional extension volunteer training program in Arizona's counties requires that participants volunteer time back to the community by answering gardening questions, the Navajo Nation already provides gardening information to local communities through the Navajo Nation New Dawn Program. Moore hopes that Master Gardener volunteers will complement rather than compete with this outreach.

Drought is a serious issue that has required the coordination of NEP members to educate ranchers on the reservation.

"As a result of our educational efforts, most grazing officials now realize the severity of the drought and the long-term effects this will have on land degradation if we do not implement emergency measures," says Wayne Franklin, Cooperative Extension agent for Diné College. The Institute for Integrated Rural Development (IIRD) at Diné College, established in 1996, includes Cooperative Extension educational outreach in the areas of economic and rural development, and natural resource management. Diné College, formerly Navajo Community College, became a land-grant college in 1994.

Combined educational outreach to individual ranchers by members of NEP is also resulting in the recognition of the need for increased regulations to control livestock. The presence of historic open range and community-use area systems on the Navajo Nation has made range management and controlled livestock reduction programs essential, yet difficult to implement. The NEP is developing a livestock



Hardrock on the Navajo Indian Reservation is an example of a community whose people are geographically isolated.

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producer survey to identify the actual number of grazing permittees, assess carrying capacities of rangeland, make recommendations for adjustments, and help implement a better nationwide stocking plan.

Programs such as the UA's Planning for Profitability record keeping workshop and the Arizona and New Mexico Beef Quality Assurance Program offer opportunities for ranchers to learn about the best use of financial inputs to get cattle to an acceptable market weight and quality.

"By working with livestock producers on better record keeping, we are also encouraging them to sell off their substandard cattle while improving the ones they retain," says Moore. "Our hope is that by maintaining smaller herds, there will not only be less impact on the land but animals better adapted to their environment, leading to increased market quality for an improved economic return."

The record keeping workshops have been offered using computers in a mobile lab. Moore hopes to take this approach a step further by teaching ranchers how to use personal digital assistants (PDAs) and global positioning systems (GPS) to gather instant range monitoring data.

All of these efforts require coordination with a constantly changing set of personnel in tribal, state, university, and federal organizations. In particular, since the NEP was established, the Navajo tribal government leadership has changed three times.

"It's a challenge to work with new administration when there is high turnover every four years," Moore says. Yet the fact that he was born and raised

on the Navajo Nation, he believes, makes a difference in "who you know and who knows you," especially on such a large reservation. Each time new personnel come on board, the educational process regarding what extension is and how resources from the university can be made available begins anew.

"Gerald is one person, Wayne is one person," says Suzanne Jamison, consultant with the Diné Tourism Corridor Demonstration Project. "The Navajo Extension Partnership has been so valuable because it allows them to coordinate programs to better serve the people." ❖

The Navajo Extension Partnership includes:

- Extension Indian Reservation Program (EIRP)
- Cooperative Extension offices for the twelve counties included in the Navajo Nation
- The Navajo Nation's Department of Agriculture, Division of Economic Development, Veterinarian Services, Eastern Agency Land Board, Environmental Quality Improvement Program
- Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Bureau of Indian Affairs Natural Resources
- Resource Committee, Navajo Tribal Council
- The University of Arizona
- Colorado State University
- New Mexico State University
- Utah State University

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